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Istook and More Than 100 Co-Sponsors Introduce Religious Freedom Amendment

To Protect Voluntary School Prayer and Religious Expression in Public

Washington, D.C. - Today Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) and more than 100 House members introduced the "Religious Freedom Amendment" to the U.S. Constitution. The proposed constitutional amendment would permit but not mandate school prayer and other religious expression on public property. The proposed text (71 words), reads:

To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience: The people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage or traditions on public property, including schools, shall not be infringed. The government shall not require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, initiate or designate school prayers, discriminate against religion, or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion.

"We now have a consensus on language and there is widespread momentum in the House and across the nation for the protection of religious freedom," stated Istook. "Thirty years of public opinion polls show that more than 75% of Americans support a constitutional amendment to protect voluntary school prayer. Now is the time we carry out the wishes of the American people."

"Under the guise of promoting tolerance, religious expression is being singled out for censorship," added Istook. "The Supreme Court has broadened Americans' First Amendment free speech rights in many controversial ways, but it has pushed back our free speech rights when it involves religion. We wouldn't need a constitutional amendment, except that un-elected judges have changed the Constitution for us, by-passing the public and its elected representatives. This is our only way to change it back; it's our peaceful answer to the religious intolerance shown by activists who constantly sue to suppress religious expression."

House Judiciary hearings are expected to place this summer and a vote on the Religious Freedom Amendment is anticipated in the fall. A constitutional amendment must pass by two-thirds in the House and Senate, and then be ratified by three-fourths of the nation's 50 states, with no approval or other role involving the President or the Governors.

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